

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5215

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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CINCPAC

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EXDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LA

SUBJ: CALL ON SECRETARY GENERAL OF LAO GOVERNMENT,

PHENG NORINDR

SUMMARY. PHENG NORINDR, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE GOVERNMENT, HAS CONCLUDED THAT HIS LONG TIME PATRON SOUVANNA PHOUUMA HAS LOST ALL AUTHORITY AND CAN NO LONGER PROTECT HIM, THAT THE MONARCHY IS DOOMED, THAT HE HIMSELF IS IN DANGER AND THAT HE HAD BETTER LEAVE THE COUNTRY IF HE CAN FIGURE OUT HOW TO DO IT, PREFERABLY WITHOUT FOREVER SACRIFICING HIS LAO NATIONALITY AND ALL HIS TIES WITH HIS COUNTRY. END SUMMARY.

1. SEPTEMBER 8 I CALLED ON SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE GOVERNMENT PHENG NORINDR WHO IS THE MOST NERVOUS MAN I HAVE YET MET IN A TOWN FULL OF NERVOUS PEOPLE. I KNOW HE HAS A RECORD OF "PUSILLANIMOUS CONCERN FOR HIS PERSONAL SAFETY," BUT HIS PRESENT STAGE OF MIND IS INTERESTING AS AN INDICATION OF THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE POWER OF HIS PATRON AND ERSTWHILE PROTECTOR, SOUVANNA PHOUUMA, HAS EVAPORATED.

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2. PHENG, WHO THOUGHT HIS OFFICE WAS "BUGGED,"

WHISPERED THAT HE WANTED TO LEAVE LAOS IN TWO MONTHS WHEN HE BECAME ELIGIBLE FOR RETIRMENT BUT WAS AFRAID HE MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO GET OUT. SOUVANNA PHOUMA HAD TOLD HIM, IN EFFECT, THAT HE WAS ON HIS OWN. SOUVANNA STILL GAVE ORDERS TO PEOPLE AND NOBODY FLATLY CONTRADICTED OR DEFIED HIM; THEY SIMPLY IGNORED HIS ORDERS AND SOUVANNA KNEW IT.

3. ON AUGUST 27 FIVE ARMED MEN, THREE IN "VIENTIANE" UNIFORMS BUT IMPOSTERS, ONE PATHET LAO AND ONE CIVILIAN, HAD APPEARED AT PHENG'S OFFICE IN A THREATENING MANNER TO INTERROGATE HIM ABOUT AUTOMOBILES HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR. HE HAD BEEN AT SOUVANNA'S HOUSE AT THE TIME AND THUS AVOIDED CONTACT BUT THE NET EFFECT WAS HIS COLLEAGUES, SUBORDINATES AND NEIGHBORS ALL HAD CONCLUDED HE WAS IN TROUBLE AND WERE AVOIDING HIM.

4. RECENTLY ANOTHER STAFFMEMBER HAD ACQUIRED A CLASSIFIED PATHET LAO DOCUMENT ACCIDENTLY DROPPED BY A PL VISITOR. THIS HAD BEEN A TIMETABLE, TWO MONTHS BEHIND SCHEDULE, FOR THE SUCCESSIVE NEUTRALIZATION OF THE ARMY, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, KING'S COUNCIL, GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNION AND THE KING HIMSELF. IT WAS SPECIFIED THE KING WAS NOT TO BE KILLED BUT SIMPLY STRIPPED OF ALL SIGNIFICANCE. HE SAID HE HAD DESTROYED THE DOCUMENT AND HAD NOT INFORMED SOUVANNA OF IT FOR FEAR SOUVANNA WOULD DEMAND AN EXPLANATION OF SOUPHANOUVONG WHO WOULD TRACE THE ORIGIN OF THE REPORT WITH DISASTROUS RESULTS FOR PHENG.

5. PHENG SAID HE WOULD BE AFRAID TO SEE ME AGAIN. HIS WIFE (A SANANIKONE COUSIN) NOW IN PARIS AND HIS DAUGHTER IN VIENTIANE BOTH WANTED HIM TO GET OUT. HE WAS TRYING TO THINK OF SOME WAY OF GETTING OUT WITHOUT ABANDONING FOREVER HIS LAO TIES AND NATIONALITY. HE WOULD PROBABLY TURN UP IN BANGKOK OR PARIS, IF LUCKY, AND ASK FOR A U.S. VISA. HE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO LEAVE WITH A MESSAGE FROM SOUVANNA TO GISCARD D'ESTAING ABOUT FUTURE ROYAL TRAVEL PLANS AND JUST KEEP GOING BUT SOUVANNA WOULD NOT OBLIGE.

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